

בו נגילה ונשמחה ה' עשה זה היום *Zeh ha yom asah Adonai – nagilah v'nismeha bo*. This is the day that God has made, let us revel and rejoice in it.

These words drawn from Psalms come to mind on this day of our annual gathering in the year 5775. I am grateful for the great joy that Kol Shofar has brought to my life over the past three years. I thank Steve Tulsy and our entire leadership for the great gift of being your Senior Rabbi for the next five years. *Todah Rabbah*, thank you to this community for making it possible to dream together.

We recently gathered to celebrate the festival of Shavuot to mark the receiving of Torah at Mt. Sinai. From Passover up to the Shavuot holiday, we studied the ancient wisdom of the Mishnah which teaches us:

*Akavia ben Mehalalel said: Look at these three and you will do no wrong: Know where you have come from, know where you are headed and know to whom you are accountable.*

And so tonight, we ask: Where are we from? Where are we headed? And who are we?

**Where are we from?** For 53 years, Kol Shofar has nurtured meaningful Judaism in a traditional framework. This is a stunning contribution, as Marin residents are known more for our healthy skepticism of the status quo, than we are for embracing tradition. But Kol Shofar is anything but the status quo.

53 years is a long time in maverick California. Led by the prolific bible scholar Rabbi Jacob Milgrom, and later by our loving Rabbi Emeritus David White, Kol Shofar has always been known for its deep love of learning and cleaving to tradition.

And from 1990 to 2010, this community has been profoundly shaped by Rabbi Lavey Derby, by his love of Torah, by his spiritual gifts. Tonight we name this here, publicly, in our annual community gathering.

In 2012, I could see that for many, the pain of his departure was too great. But today, in 2015, we express gratitude for he gave all of us. We acknowledge the deep strength of this community to come through difficult times. And we know, and recognize once again, the sustenance that Kol Shofar received through the leadership of Rabbi Chai Levy. We thank Rabbi Chai again for your presence and gratefully acknowledge that we would not be the community we are today, had it not been for her stalwart guidance through challenging days, months and years.

And so, as the *Mishnah* says, we have got to know where we are from, to know where we are going.

But we also have to know who we are, to know where we are going.

**Who are we?** We turn to Rebbe Nahman of Bratslav to find the essence of Kol Shofar. Rebbe Nahman knows how hard it is to talk to God and so he lays out multiple paths for us to consider:

First, he says, have a special room in which you talk to God.

But if you can't talk to God, then just sit in the special room – that is good enough.

If you don't have a special room, then create one for yourself, under your *tallit*.

If you can't do that, then seclude yourself with God in bed, under the covers. After all, the psalms tell us this is how King David did it.

If that doesn't work for you, open a book and let others think you are studying. But instead talk to God.

And if none of these work, there are MANY OTHER WAYS to accomplish talking to God.

Here at Kol Shofar, we take this to heart. Like Rebbe Nahman, our community is grounded in tradition, but we lovingly coax you along a path that can allow you to be in community. But we offer multiple paths within the tradition. For example, it is never too late to come to shul. Whether you want to just come for the *Kiddush*, just come for the Torah discussion, just come for the Shabbat sit meditation, it is all good. You want to bring a book and read during services? We are glad you are here. We invite you in to the possibilities that being in community can unexpectedly bring.

**We know who we are, but where are we going?** Let's look ahead. What will the big tent at Kol Shofar look like in three to five years? Dream with me.

Imagine this:

When you walk in here on a Friday, you see scores of adult learners from Dominican College here to attend a single class. But imagine if you walked in on a Tues, Wed or Thursday morning and saw the entire building filled with adult learners choosing from a cornucopia of Jewish learning options: meditation, history, culture, film, a wise aging class, Israeli dance, an open *beit midrash*, where you drop in and learn with a sage teacher guiding you through the joyful labyrinth of Jewish literature. Whether you want to learn Hebrew from scratch or make a Jewish family quilt, this would be the hub created by partnerships with other Bay Area institutions. The Center for Jewish Spirituality continues to expand and bear fruit. We have the demographic to do this: adult learners, boasting life experience, hungry to learn and the time and the resources to do it. This is the best of what we can be; taking the deep learning that Kol Shofar is known for and drawing the entire south Marin community in, whether they are members or not, Jewish or not.

Imagine – you are a Jewish parent, or you are married to a Jew. You want your elementary-school age child to learn about Jewish tradition, but an afternoon/Sunday program is not for you. You find out that Kol Shofar is opening its doors to all

children of Marin, by launching a Jewish cultural summer day camp. Children will sing, bake *hallah* and learn all about Judaism with the entire Bay Area as their petri dish: field trips to the Contemporary Jewish Museum, to Urban Adamah in the East Bay, a Noah's ark scavenger hunt at the SF Zoo, an educational outing to the San Francisco Mikvah, visiting various synagogues in our area, along with weekly swimming outings to a local pool. Our skilled teens would be employed as counselors. We have the capacity to serve more than hundred kids in a camp like this – to fill our sacred space with the boisterous sound of Jewish life year round.

Imagine – Music bursting out of the seams of this building: children in Beit Binah making music with a Jewish music educator every week, an adult choir that would go out to the community bringing joy to those in senior living homes, or for community-wide events. Imagine a Tihon band, where our teens compose original Jewish music and then play for the entire community on our plaza on Ruah day, the culminating day of Beit Binah. Imagine drumming circles, Jewish chamber music, and the infusion of music into all of our services: High Holidays, Shabbat mornings and Friday nights. Imagine an adult *B'nei Mitzvah* class and constant opportunities for learning to infuse prayer with meaning.

Are you excited about this?

Are you ready to say *hineni*, here I am, ready to build this dream together?

This beautiful space is ours. We will fill it again and again, bringing even more people closer to Jewish life. What happens inside this room is a catalyst for bringing people closer. This is why we do this sacred business tonight, here in this *beit kneset*. Look around at the sacred space you created. You labored in love to create this space within these walls. Are we not blessed to inhabit such an inspiring place? And for those of us, like me, who came after the creation of such a beautiful *makom*, we are doubly blessed by those who came before us, making it all possible. It is a holy place

of meaning, of love, of laughter, of inspiration and yes, at times, tears. We all create meaning inside these walls. You have said, “yes,” so many times and look what we have created together.

And this is the time to say “yes” again, to say “yes” to the *mitzvah* when we are asked. Whether it is bringing a meal to a mourner, greeting newcomers on Shabbat morning, digging your hands into our garden, or increasing your Annual Campaign gift, we ask that you say “yes.” Say “yes,” helps us realize the dream of a vibrant adult center of learning, an electric Jewish summer day camp and the expansion of music into our souls. The link to achieving these dreams is to give, and give generously so that we can teach and learn, nurture kids, inspire adults and to make spiritual music together. It is really that simple. We are vibrant. We are strong. We are growing. We need you to say “yes.” We need to be like Avraham – when God sought him out, he said “*Hineni.*” Here I am. Let’s do this for the sake of heaven. Let’s do this for the sake of this Jewish community we call home. It is who we are, it is where we’ve been and it is where we are going. *Todah Rabbah* – thank you.